

## DEAD

When I was working my way through school they put me with Obie the night janitor, and we got along right from the beginning. He showed me the ropes, didn't bitch when I did something dumb, let me stock the Kotex machine and took the stopped up toilets himself. In his cups, which was every night, Obie told me to make something of myself and not get stuck in a dead end job like this. About that time he passed out but we were usually at his place by then and I'd just cover him up and lock the door behind me.

I graduated from that school and went to another, got a couple degrees and then a job right back where I started. Only this time with the faculty and an office of my own and everything.

Obie was still there, worse for wear, and it was a little corny: local boy returns to scenes of his youth in triumph and mortarboard, talks to old maintenance man, takes a few hits off the bottle and they swap tall urinal tales.

But at first it was something like that. The school was dumber than I remembered, teaching not what I expected. I liked Obie better than anybody in the place and he took his turn listening while I complained about the stuffiness, the pecking order, the Xerox faces, mimeo passions.

Obie was having troubles of his own though and not long after the beginning of the second semester I was talking to myself. "Get out!" he'd say in the middle of my complaint. "Get out of janitoring before it kills you."

Christ, after I'd listened to him say the same things for years he couldn't listen to me for a few months. I was half glad when the department head said that my friendship with Obie was admirable and in the best egalitarian manner but he wondered if I couldn't spend just a little more time with my colleagues. I wasn't glad to oblige but I did it and it wasn't bad.

Then one day he was gone: no will, no illness, nothing but a note to me in that terrible handwriting he had:

GET OUT. REMEMBER OBIE KNOWS!

Obie knows. It's the assonance, I think, that bothers me the most.